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ABSTRACT

Commissioned by the Southern Ute Tribal Council and coordinated by the Education Division of the tribe, this study was undertaken to collect and analyze data relating to achievement patterns of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo children in the public school system in Ignacio, Colorado, The major objective of the study was to determine if differences existed in achievement levels of the three ethnic groups in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools and if differences were found, which demographic, attitudinal, and cultural variables were associated with the differences. A self-inventory was completed by 364 students (primary, 109; intermediate, 66; secondary, 189). A random sample of 10 Ute, 10 Hispanic, and 10 Anglo parents of high school students were interviewed. The basic findings of the study revealed that achievement differences did exist between the three ethnic groups. These differences were associated with three factors--school attendance, self concept, and parent attitudes towards the school. Eight recommendations were presented to the Ute Tribal Council for consideration in reference to this study. (ERB)

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PATTERNS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF CONCEPT AMONG STUDENTS IN A TRI-ETHNIC COMMUNITY

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PATTERNS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF CONCEPT AMONG STUDENTS IN A TRI-ETHNIC COMMUNITY

This study was undertaken to collect and analyze data relating to achievement patterns of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo children in the public school system in Ignacio, Colorado. The study was commissioned by the Southern Ute Tribal Council and coordinated by the Education Division of the tribe.

The major objective of the study was to determine if differences existed in achievement levels of the three ethnic groups in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools and if differences were found to exist to investigate reasons for the differences. The following research questions guided the investigation.

1. Are there significant differences between the three ethnic groups on measures of achievement taken over time?

2. If differences exist, which demographic, attitudinal, and cultural variables are associated with the differences in achievement?

Design of the Study

Student files in each grade level were examined and those students who had complete data files were included for the purposes of the demographic data component of the study. The following data were collected for each of the three populations.

1. Achievement Data. The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) is used by the Ignacio schools to assess achievement levels in students. Students are tested yearly in the spring. The test provides measures of reading achievement, math achievement, language achievement, and a total score.

2. Attitude Inventory. In order to determine if there were differences in attitude towards school between the Ute, Hispanic, and Anglo students, an attitude inventory was administered to all Ignacio high school students (grades 9-12) in December, 1983.

The attitude inventory, developed and standardized by Instructional Objectives Exchange, L.A., California, consists of 86 statements designed to secure a student's agreement or disagreement response to items which pertain to five aspects of attitude towards school. Examples of each subcategory are:

a) Teacher: "My teachers give assignments which are too difficult."
b) Learning: "I often buy books with my own money."
c) School Structure and Climate: "I enjoy the social life here."
d) Peer: "Students here aren't very friendly."
e) General: "Each morning I look forward to coming to school."

A total of 189 students responded to this inventory.

3. Self-Appraisal Inventory. To determine if there are differences in the way Ute, Hispanic, and Anglo students feel about themselves, a self-appraisal inventory, also developed by Instructional Objectives

Exchange, was administered to all Ignacio students in grades 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. Three forms (primary - 1st, 3rd; intermediate - 5th; secondary 8th - 12th) of this inventory were responded to by the students to indicate agreement or disagreement with a number of statements. This self-report device secured students' responses to statements which pertain to four aspects of the self-concept. Examples of each subcategory are:

a) General: "Do you wish you were younger?" (primary)
b) Family: "I often get in trouble at home." (intermediate)
c) Peer: "Most other kids have fewer friends than I do." (secondary)
d) Scholastic: "School work is fairly easy for me." (secondary)

A total of 364 students responded to the three forms of this inventory. (Primary - 109; intermediate - 66; secondary - 189.)

4. Parent Questionnaire. A parent questionnaire was developed specifically for this study in order to determine if there are similarities or differences among parents perceptions of their childrens' school experiences. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions designed to sample their opinions about various aspects of their childrens' high school experiences. Examples of the questions are:

a) "What does your child like about school?"
b) "How have you/your child been treated by the school?"
c) "Does family background have anything to do with the way your child is treated in school?"
d) "Does the curriculum of the school meet the career goals of your child?"

A random sample of 10 Ute, 10 Hispanic, and 10 Anglo parents of Ignacio high school students was selected to be interviewed by a member of the research team. These 30 parents were interviewed during December, 1983 and in January, 1984 for approximately 1 hour each. During the interview, the parents were asked to respond to the same set of 11 questions. Their narrative responses were transcribed by the interviewer.

5. Demographic Data. Data were collected for each of the three ethnic groups on family, marital status, number of children in the family, father's occupation, mother's occupation, father's eduational level, mother's educational level, and family housing status. Again, the data were collected in such a way that the identity of the family was protected. Demographic data were collected to determine if any demographic variables were asociated with patterns of achievement.

The attendance records of children were also checked so that comparisons of the relationship between attendance and achievement in the three groups could be made.

Results and Discussion

There are differences in achievement between the three ethnic groups. The differences which exist begin in second grade. Anglo students score significantly higher than Hispanic or Ute students in grade two. The Ute students score slightly higher than the Hispanic students.

Beyond grade two, the differences between the three ethnic groups persist, except that the Hispanic students' achievement levels begin to exceed the Ute students. The Anglo students continue to show slight improvements in achievement test scores and maintain higher achievement levels than the other two groups. The Hispanic students continue to increase slightly while the Ute students tend to decrease slightly.

Attendance and Achievement. Students were also compared on their CTBS scores in reading, language, math, and days absent from school. Scores for third, fifth, seventh, and eighth grades were compared for the three ethnic groups using analysis of variance. A significant interaction was found between these variances [$P<.01$] which indicated that there was a difference among the three groups on the CTBS scores as the students went from the third to the eighth grade. There was a significant interaction between CTBS scores and days absent from school.

Self-Appraisal Inventory/Attitude Inventory

An analysis of the results of data collected on the self-appraisal inventory for first, third, and fifth grade students indicate several significant differences among the three ethnic groups. It is important to remember, however, that the test results do not measure changes in groups of children over time, but represent the self-appraisal of three different age groups at one point in time.

There were no significant differences among the three ethnic groups at the first grade level. There were, however, differences in the overall scores, with Anglo children scoring the highest, Hispanics in the middle, and Ute children scoring the lowest of the three groups. Despite this trend, these data indicate that the three groups of first graders feel similarly about themselves in relation to school. In addition, the first graders scored significantly higher than the third or fifth graders on the school subtest. Thus it appears that first graders arrive at school with positive feelings about themselves and school.

By third grade, the Ute children scored significantly lower than the Anglo children on the School subscale of the inventory. They also scored significantly lower than both the Anglo and the Hispanic third graders on the General subscale of the inventory. Thus, this group of third graders (the Ute children) feels much more negatively about both themselves and school than either of the other two ethnic groups.

At the fifth grade level, Ute children again scored significantly lower on their attitudes toward school than the Anglo children. These data indicate that, by third grade, the Ute children have a significantly more negative feeling about school that appears to persist into fifth grade.

An analysis of the results of data collected on both the self-appraisal inventory and the attitude inventory for high school students indicate that each ethnic group has generally positive attitudes about school and also about themselves. On only one subcategory was there a significant difference between two groups. The teacher (mode of instruction) subcategory of the attitude inventory showed a difference between Anglo and Hispanic students. Anglo students on this subcategory had a more positive attitude towards school than Hispanics do. Examples of statements in this dimension are:

1. "Most of my teachers try to make their subjects interesting to me."

2. "Most of my teachers really like their subjects."

3. "My teachers ask me to memorize too many facts."

While there are some indications that Anglo students generally have a somewhat more positive attitude towards high school and a slightly higher self-concept, Ute students ranked very near the Anglo students on these measures and Hispanics are only slightly lower. Except in the one subcategory noted above, there are no statistically significant differences between Ute, Hispanic, or Anglo high school students with regard to the way they feel about school or themselves. On the basis of an analysis of these data, it appears that poor academic performance and low attendance rates of Southern Ute high schoolers are not the result of negative feelings about themselves or their school.

Parent Questionnaire. Although students' perceptions of their school experiences are similar, there are both similarities and marked differences among the three parent groups. An analysis of the results of the parent questionnaire support the following conclusions.

1. Anglo parents feel that school can be improved by stricter course requirements and more challenging courses (e.g., math, science, computer education). A majority agree that the school curriculum meets their child's career goals. Although they feel family background does affect the way their child is treated, this group of parents perceives these effects to be positive. In general, they find their child's school experience to be of high quality.

2. Southern Ute parents unanimously feel that school personnel should be changed in order to improve their child's schooling. Suggestions include better teacher preparation, additional tutors and/or aides, inclusion of Ute parents on the school board, and hiring a building principal who is perceived as both fair and sensitive. These parents think their child's career goals are not being met, or are uninformed regarding the relationship of curriculum to career goals. A majority of Ute parents surveyed feel that family background negatively affects the way their child is treated in school. When asked for additional comments, the responses indicated frustration over the ability to make changes, concerns about discrimination toward their child, and questions regarding fairness of school discipline policy.

3. Hispanic parents had concerns over the quality of teachers and curriculum requirements. They were particularly interested in adding a foreign language requirement. With the addition of this requirement, Hispanic parents were generally satisfied that the school curriculum met their child's career goals. A majority felt that family background did not affect the child's school experience.

These results cannot be explained by demographic differences. For example, parents in all three groups had children in Ignacio schools for a minimum of 4-5 years with the average ranging from 8.4 years (Anglo) to 10.4 years (Ute). These data indicate that the families of each ethnic group are geographically stable and therefore have perceptions of school based upon long term experience in the Ignacio community.

The demographic characteristics of the three groups are relatively similar with a few exceptions. These exceptions are noted below.

50 percent of the Ute mothers work at semi-skilled occupations, compared to 9 percent for Hispanics and 13 percent for Anglos.

42 percent of the Hispanic mothers have less than a high school education, compared to 30 percent for Utes and 9 percent for Anglos.

40 percent of the Hispanic fathers have less than a high school education compared to 19 percent of the Utes and 10 percent of the Anglos.

A further analysis was done to determine if any of the demographic characteristics interacted with achievement scores attained. Preliminary analysis found no demographic characteristics to be significantly correlated with achievement scores.

Summary and Recommendations

The basic findings of the study are that achievement differences do exist between the three ethnic groups. It is our hypothesis that these differences are associated with three factors. These factors are school attendance, self concept, and parent attitudes towards the schools. The following recommendations are presented for consideration by the Tribal Council.

1. It is recommended that the tribe institute a program to infuse more Ute people into the educational system. This includes personnel at all levels in the system including aides, teachers, principals, etc. Such people could provide culturally relevant instruction and also serve as role models for Ute children throughout the system. Personnel preparation grants could be written to develop a field-based degree program in cooperation with nearby colleges and universities.

2. It is recommended that some kind of program be initiated in elementary schools which provides all children, but particularly the Ute children, with success experiences, which make them feel good

about themselves in the school setting. The program could have two thrusts: one that is academic which more precisely focuses on unique learning styles and abilities of Ute children; another which is affective, focusing on the esteem needs of children. This second thrust could best be accomplished by initiating a comprehensive child guidance program directed by a full-time elementary counselor or child development specialist.

3. It is recommended that the tribe advocate for a cultural awareness program within the school district. The cultural awareness program could be implemented in elementary school, then be repeated again in seventh grade. The purpose of such a program would be to acquaint students with each others language and cultural heritage in order to create a learning community within the schools which facilitates achievement in all three ethnic groups. The cultural awareness program would have two primary goals.

   Goal 1 -- Develop an understanding and acceptance of cultural pluralism.

   Goal 2 -- Acquire a knowledge in language and culture specific to areas which would be sufficient to increase their involvement in each others cultures.

4. The Tribal Council should encourage tribal members and especially parents to get actively involved in the governance of the school system. This could include promoting and supporting interested, qualified tribal members to seek election to the school board and advocating an informal quota system so that there could be continuous tribal representation on the school board. By joining forces with leaders of the Hispanic community, the tribe could significantly influence the outcome of school board elections and thereby assume appropriate representation of Southern Utes and Hispanics in groups which deal with policy decisions which affect their children's schooling.

5. It is recommended that the Ute people do more direct monitoring of their children's performance in school including taking direct responsibility for improving their attendance records.

6. The Tribal Council should encourage open and effective communication between parents and the school. Parents should be encouraged to become active advocates for their children in the school setting. For those parents who are reluctant or who feel intimidated by school personnel, this could include parent advocacy training. Issues such as feelings of unfairness, discrimination, questions regarding discipline policies, and the relationship of curriculum to student's career goals can only be resolved through increased and improved communication. Parents have a responsibility to make their concerns known and to be willing to participate in the resolution of differences or conflicts. School personnel are responsible for sharing information about programs, policies, options, and requirements in ways that facilitate parent awareness. Informed parents are more likely to have positive feelings about their child's schooling.

Their informed opinions are more likely to be considered with decisions when school policies and practices are made. A tribal program designed to promote parent advocacy can have a significant impact on the process of communication and decision making.

7. The Tribal Council should work with school officials to adopt instructional practices and curriculum programs which reflect the unique learning styles and cultural background of Native American students. The application of research in the neuro-sciences to educational settings clearly indicates that Native American and other minority students have styles of learning that are qualitatively different than majority or Anglo students. When instructional practices and curricular organization are altered to reflect these unique differences, learning for these youngsters becomes easier and more effective. One approach, for example, has been to take that large body of research which falls within the category called Effective School Research, and modify it to reflect a Native American point of view. Based upon the evidence available to date, this would appear to be an excellent approach to implement at Ignacio schools.

8. It is recommended that funding be sought for a research study which would test an actual intervention program to improve school achievement in the Ute population. This would require securing the school's permission and their testing some systems that have worked in other cultures to improve school achievement.

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